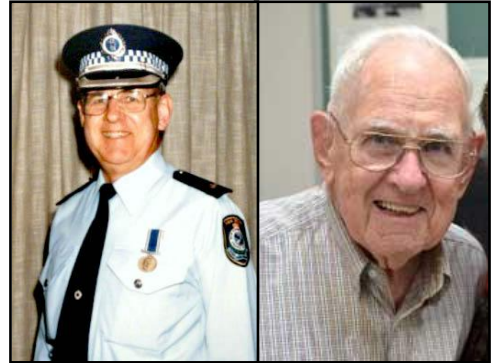


NSW ANZFSS BRANCH LIFE MEMBER PROFILE

John Snowden

John Snowden joined the NSW Police Force in 1947, and spent 31½ years of his 37 year Police career in the Scientific Investigation Branch (later renamed the Forensic Services Group); commencing as the most junior staff member and eventually becoming the Detective Chief Inspector in Charge then until his retirement in the role of OIC of No. 1 Division (covering south central Sydney) in September 1984. During his



*Then & Now: John Snowden, ANZFSS
Life Member (NSW Branch)*

career, John introduced many technical innovations in the field of photography. And he helped solve some of Australia's most notorious crimes of murder, rape, poisonings, manslaughter, arson, fatal motor and industrial accidents and criminal abortions. Included among those were numerous exhumations of bodies, attendances (in some cases assisting) at post mortem examinations and one of Australia's most publicised cases; the 1960 kidnapping of Graeme Thorne (the son of Basil Thorne who had won the Sydney Opera House Lottery). He was involved in that investigation from the initial examination of the body where found to the final conviction of Stephen Leslie Bradley when sentenced to life imprisonment. Mr Snowden's team worked tirelessly to police the community, capture useful forensic images, complete scientific investigations and reduce crime.

Mr Snowden's father was also a Police Officer and, when John was 10 years old, his father brought home a Kodak No. 1A folding pocket camera. That was the beginning of Mr Snowden's lifelong affair with photography. When aged just 17, a detective in Lismore, where John lived, asked him to photograph the body of a murdered man at the Lismore Base Hospital Morgue. Using his Kodak folding camera, a tripod, a flashbulb which had the same socket as a torch bulb, plus a torch he approached the problem. At that time, flash synchronisation was only available on expensive cameras. To solve the problem the morgue was darkened, with the camera on a tripod, the shutter was opened, the flash fired and the shutter closed. The result was a perfect photograph accepted by the Courts. That, taken seven years before John would join the NSW Police, was his first forensic photograph. This experience was followed by untold types of photography in the quest of forensic justice.

Early in his Police career Mr Snowden was a founding member of the New South Wales Forensic Science Society (so called prior to becoming ANZFSS) and was a co-speaker on the Graeme Thorne Kidnapping investigation at the inaugural meeting. He later became President of the NSW Branch for some years and was Chair of the 7th International Symposium on the Forensic Sciences in Sydney in 1978.

Other police investigations on which he worked varied from an illegal abortion clinic at Bondi Junction, a number of thallium poisonings and an axe attack by a mother on her ten month old son. Mr Snowden filmed, edited and produced many Police instructional cine films and also filmed the Bathurst Jail Riots and the 1971 Springboks football match at the SCG where anti-apartheid supporters invaded the field in an attempt to disrupt the game.

John Snowden fondly remembers his years investigating and photographing crime scenes and exhibits. He recalls that all scientific section branch stations had full camera kits including still cameras; Rollei SL66's or Nikon's (and earlier, Pentak SLRs). Specialised photo equipment such as cine cameras & associated equipment, colour processing (slides, negative film and printing) photogrammetry were located in Sydney. They all had full darkroom facilities with top quality enlargers (Durst dual lens, auto focus). And every member of the Scientific Section had to develop his own films and enlarge and process his own prints which were required by Courts for continuity of possession. Mr Snowden designed and made an aluminium device to hold a camera and offender identification brooch. These were issued to over 120 police stations, enabling untrained operators to produce standardised photographs of offenders. He constructed initial batches of these devices in his own workshop. He also developed a multi-purpose camera stand for photographing fingerprints on portable items and other details in normally inaccessible positions (there were no digital cameras with articulated viewing screens then!)

Mr Snowden was a very well respected forensic officer. The Scientific Investigation Branch he led was responsible for investigating, photographing, measuring and documenting crime scenes and presenting those facts and associated photos and exhibits to the various Courts involved in the justice system. During his time there, he introduced many technical innovations in the field of photography and items of hardware manufactured in his home workshop, several of these items of specialised equipment did not then exist commercially. Impressively, John would design and build basic equipment which was installed state-wide for the uniform photographing of offenders in custody.

The NSW Branch of ANZFSS proudly presents John Snowden as a Life Member.